

Access to Recycling in the Great Lakes Region

Access to recycling refers to how easy and convenient it is for residents to recycle the materials they generate. Recycling systems typically provide access through:

- **Curbside collection** for single and multi-family households
- **Community drop-off depots** or recycling centers
- **Subscription Plans** that offer private collection
- **Return-to-retail collection programs** for specific materials such as plastic bags and film.

Access is one of the strongest predictors of recycling participation. When recycling is convenient, households are significantly more likely to participate consistently, increasing material recovery and reducing waste sent to landfill.

According to the Circular Economy for Plastics in the Bi-National Great Lakes Region gap analysis report prepared for Circular Great Lakes by Resource Recycling Systems (RRS)

- **53% of US households** have access to automatic curbside recycling
- Ontario and Quebec have much higher curbside recycling access, **both above 90%**
- An additional **20% of US households** have access to recycling through optional subscription programs.
- **21% of US households** only have access to drop-off services.

Why Access to Recycling Matters

Access to recycling is one of the strongest drivers of recycling participation and overall system performance. When recycling services are convenient and readily available, households are more likely to recycle consistently, leading to higher recovery rates and a more reliable supply of recyclable materials. Increased access helps divert valuable materials from landfills and the environment, reduces plastic pollution, and provides cleaner feedstock for manufacturing new products. It also improves the efficiency of collection programs, supports jobs throughout the recycling value chain, and can reduce long-term municipal waste management costs.

In practice, successful recycling systems follow a simple progression:

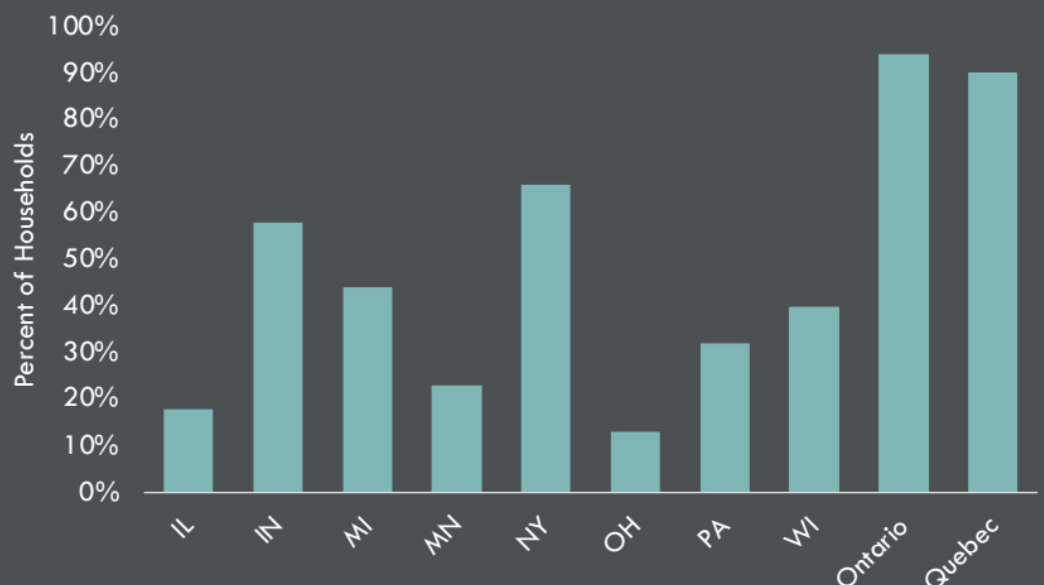
Greater Access > Higher Participation > Higher Recycling Rates

Because participation depends on the availability of convenient collection options, measuring both access and participation provides a more complete picture of recycling system performance than recycling rates alone.

So, Where does the Great Lakes Region Stand?

Source: 'Circular Economy for Plastics in the Bi-National Great Lakes Region Recycling System GAP Analysis Findings', RRS Recycling, MAY 2021

ACCESS TO PROGRAMS ACCEPTING CORE AND SOME EMERGING PLASTIC PACKAGING



Recycling Governance Across the Region

Recycling systems across North America are governed differently, resulting in varying levels of access and service. In the United States, residential recycling is typically managed by local governments, so accepted materials, collection methods, and program availability often differ from one community to another. Some states establish minimum recycling requirements, while many leave program design and funding to municipalities.

In Canada, provinces set the regulatory framework for residential recycling, creating greater consistency across each jurisdiction, while municipalities often continue to oversee collection. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) programs, now widely adopted in Canada and beginning to emerge in the United States, including Minnesota, shift responsibility for funding and managing residential recycling from municipalities to producers, helping create more consistent and financially sustainable recycling systems.

Across the Great Lakes region, approaches vary. Pennsylvania and Wisconsin have the clearest population-based curbside recycling requirements. Minnesota and Ohio require broad recycling access but allow a mix of curbside and drop-off programs. Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and New York rely more on county or regional planning and locally determined collection systems. Ontario and Quebec have transitioned to producer-led residential recycling systems under EPR.



Key Takeaways for Decision-Makers

Expand access equitably- by improving recycling opportunities for multi-family housing, rural communities, and other underserved areas.

Provide multiple collection options- A combination of curbside collection, community drop-off depots, and return-to-retail programs helps maximize participation and material recovery.

Pair access with education- Public awareness and clear recycling guidance are essential to ensure available services are fully utilized.

Expand accepted materials where practical and supported by local processing capacity and end markets.

Measure access, participation, and recycling rates together to identify infrastructure gaps and better evaluate recycling system performance.

Support regional collaboration- by sharing best practices and coordinating investments across Great Lakes jurisdictions.

Improving recycling access- across the Great Lakes region can increase material recovery, reduce waste and plastic pollution, strengthen recycling markets, and advance regional circular economy goals.

Beyond Access- Strong recycling outcomes also depend on education, infrastructure, market demand for recycled materials, and consistent collection systems.

Municipal Recycling Access Requirements in the Great Lakes Region

State/Province	Municipal or Local Requirement	Curbside Recycling Required?	Bill, Act or Regulation
Illinois	Counties must prepare and implement solid-waste management plans containing recycling programs. Programs were originally required to target recycling 15% of municipal waste within three years and 25% within five years , designate a recycling coordinator, and provide public education. The law does not require every municipality to operate curbside collection.	No statewide municipal curbside mandate	Solid Waste Planning and Recycling Act , 415 ILCS 15, particularly §§ 6 and 7
Indiana	Counties, except Marion County , generally participate in solid-waste management districts responsible for planning, public education and programs supporting recycling and waste reduction. State law does not establish a population-based requirement for municipalities to provide household curbside recycling. Services are determined locally or by the district.	No statewide municipal curbside mandate	Indiana Code, Title 13, Article 21 — Solid Waste Management Districts, including IC 13-21-3 and IC 13-21-5
Michigan	Counties must develop materials management plans containing measurable diversion goals and strategies for increasing recycling access and participation. Plans may rely on curbside programs, drop-off locations, processing facilities or other approaches. Municipalities are not universally required to provide curbside service.	Phased curbside-access standards; municipal operation not universally required.	Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act , 1994 PA 451, Part 115; substantially amended by 2022 PA 243
Minnesota	Counties must ensure that residents of single-family and multi-family housing have an opportunity to recycle , including access through curbside pickup or collection centers . At least one designated recycling center must be available in each county . A designated center must generally operate at least 12 hours per week year-round and accept at least four materials. This is an access requirement rather than a universal municipal curbside mandate.	Access required; curbside required in some but not all municipalities.	Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 115A , including §§115A.552 and 115A.555
New York	Municipalities were required to adopt local laws mandating the source separation of recyclable or reusable materials for which economic markets exist. Local planning units must explain how materials will be recovered, but state law does not require every municipality to provide curbside collection; collection systems vary by locality.	Source separation required; curbside not universally required	General Municipal Law §120-aa and Environmental Conservation Law Article 27
Ohio	Solid-waste management districts must demonstrate that at least 80% of the residential population in each county has an opportunity to recycle, unless a lower percentage is approved. Districts may meet the standard through curbside service, full- or part-time drop-off locations and other qualifying programs. Districts must also pursue a 25% residential and commercial waste-reduction and recycling rate.	Access required; curbside not universally required	Ohio Revised Code Chapter 3734 and Ohio Administrative Code Rule 3745-27-90

Municipal Recycling Access Requirements in the Great Lakes Region (cont.)

State/Province	Municipal or Local Requirement	Curbside Recycling Required?	Bill, Act or Regulation
Pennsylvania	Municipalities with populations of 10,000 or more , or more than 5,000 but fewer than 10,000 with density over 300 people per square mile , must implement recycling programs that generally include curbside collection. Programs must collect designated recyclable materials and serve residential and certain commercial, municipal and institutional establishments.	Yes, for municipalities meeting the thresholds	Municipal Waste Planning, Recycling and Waste Reduction Act — Act 101 of 1988, particularly §1501
Wisconsin	Responsible units must operate an effective recycling program. Municipalities with populations of at least 5,000 and population densities greater than 70 people per square mile generally must provide curbside collection. Smaller or less densely populated rural municipalities may provide conveniently located drop-off collection instead.	Yes, for municipalities meeting the thresholds	Wisconsin Statutes §287.11 and Wisconsin Administrative Code Chapter NR 544
Ontario	As of January 1, 2026, producers , not municipalities, are responsible for operating and financing the provincial Blue Box system. Producers must provide curbside collection to eligible residences that receive curbside garbage collection and appropriate depot or alternative service in other circumstances. Municipalities may continue providing collection under agreements with producer organizations, but the legal obligation rests primarily with producers.	Required for eligible sources, but it is a producer obligation	Resource Recovery and Circular Economy Act , 2016 and O. Reg. 391/21: Blue Box
Quebec	Quebec's modernized selective-collection system places responsibility for developing, operating and financing packaging, container and printed-paper collection on obligated producers and their designated management organization . Municipalities may perform collection and related services through agreements, but there is not a general population-based municipal curbside mandate.	No general municipal mandate; producer-led system	Environment Quality Act , Chapter Q-2, and Regulation respecting a system of selective collection of certain residual materials , Q-2, r. 46.01